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PROJECT SUMMARY

ATLANTIC FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT

Newfoundland Region

No. 19, May 1990

WHALE/SHARK ENTRAPMENT RELEASE PROGRAM

Introduction

For the past ten years, assistance has been provided to fishermen in Newfoundland and Labrador who incidentally catch large whales and sharks in their fishing gear.

The Entrapment Release Program was conducted again in 1989 with the financial support of the Fisheries Development Division, Department of Fisheries and Oceans, Newfoundland Region. Additional funding for the program was provided by Memorial University of Newfoundland, the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Fisheries, the National Museum of Natural Science, World Wildlife Fund, Environment Canada and the Island Foundation.

Fisheries and Oceans Pêches et Océans

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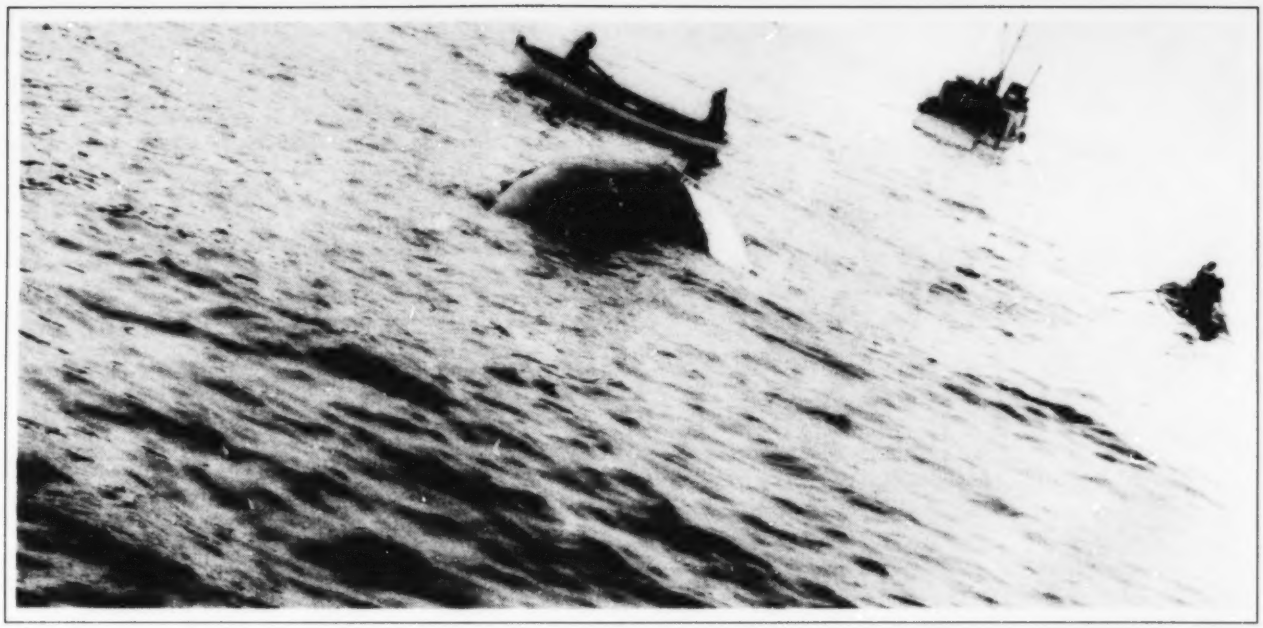

Background

In the late 1970's fishermen experienced considerable losses to large whales and sharks. Studies of the problem by researchers at Memorial University of Newfoundland indicated that major losses occurred when an animal was entrapped by fishing gear, and struggled until it finally died. Such accidents commonly destroyed codtraps and nets, costing thousands of dollars. In addition, these large, strong animals often towed away fishing gear, usually until the lines trailing behind caught additional fishing gear. Because of the extraordinary losses which occurred during such entrapments of live animals, it was decided to develop methods to quickly remove them from fishing gear with minimum damage to the gear itself.

The techniques developed substantially reduce gear damage and losses of fish due to down time, and ensure that the animal is safely removed without hazard to fishermen.

Toll-Free Telephone Service

Fishermen throughout the province simply have to call for free assistance if they have a problem. A toll-free telephone service is provided to fishermen who catch large animals, dead or alive, and require assistance or advice in removing them from gear. (Call collect to 753-5495 day or night). When aid is requested, a crew is dispatched as quickly as possible. Fishermen are encouraged to report other problems as well, such as marine mammal strandings, ice entrapments of whales and gear entrapments of seals and marine turtles.

Ten species of whales and four species of sharks were reported incidentally caught by fishermen during 1989. The most commonly entrapped whale was the humpback. These whales are responsible for most inshore collisions and, because they have long fins and are covered with barnacles, they most commonly are caught and held by fishing gear. An estimated total of 730 collisions were recorded with fishing gear during 1989; cost of these collisions in gear losses is estimated to be about $220,000.

In past years, assistance was given in marketing basking sharks. The cash value of the fins and the liver which could be sold was in the area of several hundred dollars per fish. In some years, several hundred sharks were sold. However, in 1989 markets for the liver were poor and, as a result, very few animals were sold.

Summary

The Entrapment Release Program will continue in 1990 with financial support from the Fisheries Development Division of Fisheries and Oceans. It is a very cost effective means of minimizing fishermen's most serious losses to whales and sharks.

During 1990, the Program in cooperation with Memorial University and the Fisheries Innovation Center will be testing alarms to scare whales away from fishing gear. These devices may prevent whale collisions with fishing gear and provide additional protection for fishermen in areas where whales are plentiful.

Troubles With Whales or Sharks?

If you have a live or dead whale in your fishing gear, call the number listed here. We can give you advice, supply you with special gear that will help and will send a trained crew to help release the whale and minimize damage to your gear. FREE.

Some sharks are now valuable. If you catch a large shark, especially a basking shark, in your fishing gear call the number listed here and we will advise you on the sale of the animals.

If whales or seals, either alive or dead, strand on a beach in your area or are trapped on ice, we would also appreciate hearing about it.

Call Collect

753-5495 – day or night

This service is free from the Whale Research Group at Memorial University of Newfoundland; Fisheries Development Division, Fisheries and Oceans, and the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Fisheries.